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## **Kevin's Law Back in the Legislature**

*Senators George and Bernero reintroduce bipartisan mental health legislation*

LANSING – Sen. Tom George, R-Texas Township, and Sen. Virg Bernero, D-Lansing, reintroduced their “Kevin’s Law” proposal, Wednesday, August 13, which would create an assisted outpatient commitment mechanism in Michigan.

In August 2000 Kevin Heisinger, a 24-year-old University of Michigan student, was murdered by a severely schizophrenic man who had received psychiatric treatment but had stopped taking his medication. This incident and others like it have helped focus attention on the need for mental health reform in Michigan.

“After deinstitutionalization, many people with mental illness are left adrift with nowhere to turn,” Bernero said. “Too often they end up on the streets, in jail or dead. People with mental illness and the communities in which they live deserve better.”

Along with two other Senators, George and Bernero introduced four bills, Senate Bills 683 - 686, which would amend the mental health code to create an assisted outpatient treatment mechanism.

“Senator Tom George and his cosponsors are to be commended for introducing this compassionate law to make assisted outpatient treatment available to the most seriously mentally ill citizens of Michigan—people whose brain diseases prevent them from knowing they are ill,” said Mary Zdanowicz, Executive Director of the Treatment Advocacy Center in Arlington, Virginia. “Senator George’s proposal offers hope for greatly reducing homelessness, hospitalizations, arrests and violence for this population—results that have been dramatic in other states, like New York, with similar legislation.” The Treatment Advocacy Center is a nonprofit organization devoted to eliminating barriers to treatment of severe mental illness.

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“Senator Bernero and I began working on this legislation two years ago in the State House,” George said. “It is truly a bipartisan effort to update our commitment law to reflect the trend towards outpatient treatment.”

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema and Governor Jennifer Granholm have each recently announced the formation of task forces to review the mental health system. George and Bernero both serve on the Senate Health Policy Committee.